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THE STORY OF TIM

Translated from the Russian

BY

GEORGE BORROW

LONDON :

PRINTED FOR PRIVATE CIRCULATION

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INTRODUCTION

THE Russians have three grand popular tales, the subjects of which are thievish adventures. One is called the *Story of Klim*, another is called the *Story of Tim*, and the third is called the *Story of Tom*. Below we present a translation of the *Story of Tim*.

That part of the tale in which Tim inquires of the drowsy Archimandrite as to the person to whom the stolen pelisse is to be awarded, differs in no material point from a portion of a tale narrated in the Turkish story-book of the lady and the forty vizirs. The concluding part, however, in which we are told how Tim's comrades twice stole the pig from him, and how he twice regained it, is essentially Russian, and is original.

THE STORY OF TIM

IN a certain village there lived an old man who had lost almost the whole of his hair, partly from age, and partly from the friction of his fur cap, which he never laid aside, either by day or night. He had a helpmeet as ancient as himself, but who differed from him in having a hump. Our story, however, does not relate to them, but to a son of theirs, called Timoney, who was a sharp lad enough, but who had learnt nothing but to play on the fife. The old man thinking that music, however sweet, would never fill the belly, and that it was quite impossible to live on an empty stomach, determined to have the boy taught some trade, but

ere fixing on what it should be, he deemed it expedient to consult his old woman on the subject; and, accordingly, requested her opinion, adding that he would wish to see the boy either a blacksmith, or a tailor.

“No!” cried the old woman. “I’ll have him neither the one nor the other. The blacksmith by always going amidst fire and soot is so begrimed that he looks rather like a devil than a man. Would you make a monster of him? As for a tailor—I don’t deny that tailoring is a rare art, but sitting doubled up, in a little time brings on a consumption.”

“Then what would you make of him?” cried the old man.

“Make of him?” said she; “why a goldsmith, or a painter, or something similar.”

“And do you know,” said the old man, “how much money one must lay down to have him bound either to a goldsmith or a painter?

Why he would swallow up all we have, or more."

They disputed so long, that they almost came to blows. The old woman had already armed herself with the fire-pan. At last, however, they agreed to bind their son to the first master they should meet, whatever his trade might be. So the old man, taking with him the sum of ten roubles, which he destined for the binding his son out as an apprentice, set out leading Tim by the hand. It happened, that the first people he met were two born brothers, who maintained themselves by levying taxes on the highway, and besides being tax-gatherers were expert tailors, using their needles so adroitly, that with a stitch or two they could make for themselves a coat or mantle; in plain language, they were robbers.

The old man, after saluting them, said :
" Are you craftsmen ? "

“ Oh, yes ! and very skilful ones,” replied the highwaymen.

“ And what may be your trade ? ” inquired the old man.

“ What is that to you ? ” they replied.

“ Why, I wish to give my son a trade,” said the old man.

“ Oh ! we will take your son with pleasure,” they cried, “ and instruct him in what we understand ourselves. As for our trade, we have particular reasons for not telling you what it is. Know, however, that you will never repent entrusting your son to our hands.”

“ But what must I give you for your trouble, good people ? ” cried the old man.

“ Why, you can hardly give us less than twenty roubles,” replied the craftsmen.

“ O ! where shall I get so much money ? ” cried the old man. “ I have but ten roubles in all the world.”

"O, very well! hand them over," said they, "We'll take them, though they be only ten roubles; we don't wish to higgle with you."

The old man gave them the money, and begging them to spare no pains in teaching his son their trade, he trudged homeward. Remembering, however, that it was necessary to know where they dwelt, he turned back, and went along with them. After some time, they came to a house in a great wood, where the thieves lived with a young girl who was their sister. On their arrival they took off from Tim his rough country craftan and breeches, and clothed him in habiliments of the very best quality, and regaled the old man with plenty of capital wine. So the old man, after staying an hour or two, left their dwelling quite happy and content.

As soon as it was night, the thieves thought that they would give Tim his first lesson in their art, so arming him in the same manner as they did

themselves, with a pike and a long knife, they went out on the road. As soon as they were got there, one of the masters said to the pupil :

“ Suppose, now, any people were to attack us, what would you do, Tim ? ”

“ What’s this for ? ” said he, grasping his knife ; “ with this I don’t care a straw for a dozen men.”

“ It will be of service to you, no doubt, some time or other,” said the thieves ; “ it will be best, however, that your first essay be in something not quite so dangerous as levying taxes on the highways generally is. We will go to the neighbouring monastery, and break into the treasury of the Archimandrite ; we shall find there quite enough to enrich us.”

“ O ! just as you please,” cried Timoney ; “ where the master goes the ‘prentice follows.”

So away they went, all three in high spirits. When they came to the cloister, they flung an

iron hook upon the roof of the treasure-room, and Tim climbing up by means of a rope which was attached to it, at once gave proof that he was anything but a dull pupil. In a trice a hole was made in the roof—the chests in the treasury were broken open—money-bags were piled up upon the floor, and then flung down out of the treasury upon the ground, where they were gathered up by Tim's comrades, and what had taken a long series of years to acquire was in a few minutes lost to the proprietor. All would have gone on in the smoothest manner in the world, provided Tim had been anything of a fool. But he knew perfectly well that his friends below would take all the money by virtue of being his instructors, and would not give him a share ; he, therefore, took from out of a chest the cloak of the Archimandrite, which was made of the choicest sable-skin, and flung it out of the hole upon the

ground, intending it for himself, but had no sooner done so, than one of his masters took it up and put it on. Tim then, letting himself down began to feel for the cloak upon the ground, for it was very dark.

“What are you groping for?” said his masters.

“I am seeking for my cloak,” answered Tim.

“What do you mean by calling it yours?” said one. “I have put it on myself. How should it belong to you?”

“Because,” said Tim, “I took it for myself, and not for you.”

“But we are your instructors,” said they, “consequently whatever you take belongs to us.”

“O! no,” cried he, with a loud voice. “I got the money for you, it is true, and no share of that belongs to me, but the cloak is mine.”

“You lie, fool,” said they.

“O! if you talk in that manner,” said Tim,

“I will go and ask the Archimandrite, and the one to whom he adjudges it shall have the cloak.”

“Let’s see how you’ll go to work,” said they.

“You shall,” said he, “only don’t be afraid.”

Thereupon, he went to the window of the cell in which the Archimandrite and his servant slept, the latter a very lively lad, and a great teller of pleasant stories. Tim peeping in, perceived that the Archimandrite was asleep, and snoring like a hedgehog, but the lad was awake. Tim tapped with his finger against the window, whereupon the lad got up and looked out. But before he could ask who was there, Tim seized him by the ears with both his hands, dragged him out, and tying a handkerchief over his mouth, delivered him to the custody of his associates. Then climbing softly in at the window, he lay down in the young fellow’s bed. After waiting a little time, he fell to arousing

the Archimandrite. His masters who were listening under the window, hearing him try to awake the ghostly man, begged him to come out.

“What are you about?” they cried. “The devil take you and the cloak, too! Woe is us, that we ever came here with you!”

But without attending to them, he cried :

“Father Archimandrite! your reverence!”

“Hey! what!” replied the Archimandrite, in a voice half-suffocated with sleep.

“I have had a very bad dream,” said Tim, “I dreamt that thieves broke into the treasure-room, and carried away all the money, and also your cloak of sable. He who climbed up to steal the treasure, took the cloak out of the box, intending it for himself. He gave his comrades all the money, and only wanted to keep the cloak; but they refused to give it him. Now, who do you say should have the cloak?”

The Archimandrite imagining that it was his chamberlain who was speaking to him, cried :

“ Oh, how tiresome you are ! People are sure to dream at night. Pray don’t trouble my rest.”

Tim was silent for a time, but no sooner had the Archimandrite fallen asleep again, than he again awoke him, crying :

“ Whom is the cloak to be given to ? ”

“ Oh, you tiresome fellow ! ” cried the Archimandrite. “ Well, if you must know, I would have it given to him who broke in. But, pray, let me sleep.”

Tim troubled him no more, and as soon as he was fast asleep got out of the window and took possession of the cloak without any opposition from his teachers, who extolled his cleverness to the skies. They set out for home, and the first thing they did when they arrived was to ride their booty. After this adventure, Tim’s

masters frequently discoursed with each other about their apprentice. His address and cleverness pleased them exceedingly. They hoped that he would be of the greatest assistance to them, and in order to keep him with them, they determined to give him their sister, who was rather a pretty girl. When they declared their mind to Tim, he was far from refusing so good a match, for they offered plenty of money with her. So he married, and ceasing to be their apprentice, became their brother-in-law and comrade.

After some time his wife said to him :

“ It is bad living with these brothers of mine who are thieves to the very bone. Moreover, you know the rhyme, ‘ Though the thief may thrive for many a day, he becomes at last the hangman’s prey.’ So it is my wish and counsel that we separate from them at once and for ever, and go and live at your father’s house,

where, though we may not be so rich, we shall at any rate be in peace."

Tim approved of what she said, and communicated his intention to those honest gentlemen—his brothers-in-law. They were very much mortified at what he told them, and endeavoured to persuade him to stay with them, but in vain. At last they said :

"We will let you go on the following conditions : we will give you a swine, and if to-night we contrive to steal it from you, you shall pay us two hundred roubles, or remain in our service till you have gained for us that amount, and if we are unable to steal the swine, we will pay the same sum to you."

"Very good," said Tim, "I will see whether you can steal her away from me."

Then he loaded a cart with his property, and set off with his wife to the house of his father.

As soon as he got home he mixed up in the

trough a mess of barley-meal and wine for the pig, who, after gorging herself with it, became senselessly drunk. Tim, then, dressing her in a sarafan or woman's long night-gown, placed her on the petsch or stove in a corner, where she stretched herself out and lay without motion. He then went to bed with his wife in the chamber above. They were scarcely asleep when the thieves arrived, and searched in every nook and corner round about the house, but not finding what they were in quest of, they repaired to the kitchen, and, listening, heard something snoring. Forthwith one of them crept in, and moving about softly touched the swine, but feeling the nightgown at the same time, he jumped out of the kitchen almost frightened out of his wits.

“Who are you?” cried his comrade.

“Your brother,” he replied. “Oh, I got into such a scrape. The thing which is snoring in

the kitchen is the old beldame, Tim's mother. I took hold of her by the side, but so softly that I did not wake her, and such a stench came from her that I really thought I should have fainted. Now, what to do I don't know—but, stay! I will go and ask my sister where the swine is. Perhaps she will tell me whilst she is dozing." He then climbed softly on the top of the chamber, removed a board from the roof, and, poking his sister gently with his stick, said: "Wife! where did we put the sow?"

"Don't you remember," said she, "that we placed her in the kitchen, on the petsch, dressed in a nightgown?"

No sooner did the thief hear this than he sprang like a madman from the roof, and rushing into the kitchen, dragged off from the petsch the drunken swine. He and his brother then lugged her away from the house, and when they had got to some distance, they tied her feet

together, and thrusting a stick under, they carried her off on their shoulders at full trot. This riding on a stick—which was very different from lying in a cradle—soon brought the sow to her senses, who began to behave in a very obstreperous and disagreeable manner, and the faster they went the more obstreperous and disagreeable did she become. The thieves now began to repent of the expedient which they had devised for bringing back Tim to their society ; but, fearing to lose two hundred roubles, they bore all the nuisance of the swine, and hastened on their way.

Tim awoke a little time after the swine had been carried away, and being quite drowsy clean forgot what he had done with her.

“Wife! wife!” cried he, jogging his bedfellow on the side with his elbow, “where did we hide the swine?”

“How long is it,” said she, “since you asked

me that? Did I not tell you that she lies on the petsch in the night-gown?"

"When did you tell me that?" cried he.

"Not long ago," said she; "but no doubt you were drowsy."

"Now, farewell to our swine!" said Tim. "No doubt they have taken her away." And springing from the bed he ran into the kitchen, but found no swine upon the petsch. Tim felt his knees quake under him. But the prospect of living with the thieves, as their slave, compelled him to cast aside all useless despondency, and to seek a remedy for the misfortune. Flinging himself upon his horse he galloped off in the hope of overtaking the travelling swine, in which he succeeded. He came up with the party just as they were entering the wood, and rode gently after them; the night, which was exceedingly dark, preventing the thieves from seeing him. By this time they were excessively weary, and

wishing to take some rest, they flung the swine upon the ground in a rage, and one of them said :

“What a weight! It’s enough to kill one. Yet one must not mind toiling when two hundred roubles are at stake.”

Quoth the other: “I would almost give up the roubles for a horse or something to carry this load of carrion for us.”

Meanwhile, Tim, leading his horse some way aside, tied it to a tree, then drawing softly nigh he began to make a jingling with the bridle and stirrups which he had taken off the horse. One of the thieves hearing the jingling said :

“Listen, brother! some horse is going about entangled in its harness.”

As Tim still continued jingling, one of them fully persuaded that there was a horse close at hand set off to catch it, whilst the other rested himself sitting close by the swine. Tim moved

on before the thief, who followed, expecting every moment to lay his hand upon the strayed horse. Imperceptibly he led him to a great distance, and then leaving him hurried back to the other. When he was not more than twenty yards from him he stopped and cried :

“ Pray, brother, come and help me to untie this accursed brute.”

The fellow, imagining that it was his brother, got up to help him, saying :

“ A pretty baby you, who cannot untie a horse.”

Tim, however, pretending that he could not hold the horse, moved away, and led him very far from the road. Then leaving him to seek his brother who was in vain pursuit of the horse he ran to where the swine lay, and, seizing hold of her, placed her upon his horse and carried her off. As soon as he got home he tied her by the leg to the hand-mill which stood in the

middle of the kitchen, round which he strewed a quantity of rye. Forthwith the swine fell to eating the rye, and, by moving round, set the mill a grinding. Tim then flung himself upon his bed, and without any care resigned himself to sleep.

In the meanwhile the thieves met each other.

One said, "Where's the horse?"

The other answered, that he had never caught a glimpse of it.

"Then why did you call me to help you to untie it?" said the first.

"You are mad!" replied the other; "I never spoke a word."

"Well, then," said his comrade, "it is plain that fellow Tim has played us a trick. Let us go and see whether the swine is where we left her."

But, after seeking her for a long time in vain, they concluded that their brother-in-law had

carried her back with him home, whereupon they set off for Tim's house with all speed.

On arriving at the court-yard, they went to the kitchen, and one of them said :

“ Brother, I am afraid we have lost our two hundred roubles. The old beldame, Tim's mother, is awake and up. Don't you hear her getting the mill in order? She is going to grind. However, I will go to my sister, and ask her, as I did before, where the swine is hid ; perhaps it is not in the kitchen.”

So he climbed up upon the roof as he had done before, and waking his sister said :

“ Wife, where is the swine ? ”

“ You must be asleep,” she replied ; “ have you forgotten that she is tied to the hand-mill in the kitchen ? ”

The thief, having learnt where the swine was, ran to the kitchen, and seizing his booty hastened away with his brother, saying :

“Master Tim has taught us a lesson ; he will not deceive us again.”

Shortly after this Tim awoke, and jumping up, ran to look after the swine. But on entering the kitchen, he perceived that she had been stolen a second time. Nothing now remained for him to do but to run and overtake the thieves, and discover some means of deceiving them again. He ran without any burden on his back, and besides, was all the fresher for having rested, consequently he had no difficulty in overtaking the tired thieves, who were carrying the swine between them. He went softly behind them till they came to the wood.

As soon as they had entered it one of the thieves said to his comrade :

“ Let us rest awhile here.”

But the other replied :

“ No, brother ; if Tim overtakes us here, he will trick us again by some means or other.

But some way farther on you remember there is an empty cottage, near the road, there we can rest without danger."

"Very good," said his comrade, "we will stop there."

Tim, hearing what they said, turned aside, and, getting before them, daubed his face with clay; then, running as fast as he could to the cottage, he sat down within the ruined petsch, holding in his hand a brick. He had not waited five minutes when they entered the cottage and cast the swine down upon the floor.

"Now, brother," said one, "we have nearly finished the business, let us smoke a pipe of tobacco."

"Capital!" replied the other, taking out his flint and steel; but though he struck and struck, he could not make the tinder take light. "Here's a pretty affair," said he, "the tinder got

damp as I ran amidst the dew of the wood endeavouring to overtake that rascal Tim."

"Go to the mouth of the petsch," said the other, "perhaps a spark will take hold of the soot."

The other went up to the petsch and began again to strike. In the meantime Tim, looking full at him, gnashed his teeth violently. The thief, hearing something gnashing, struck harder than before, and, looking into the petsch by the light of the sparks, instantly fell to the ground, for seeing the face of Tim he took him for the devil and was so terrified that he could only utter with a broken voice :

"Oh, brother!—the devil!—the devil!"

Thereupon, Tim knocked violently upon the petsch, and hurled the brick at the other thief, who made for the door, but, striking his forehead against the lintel, he fell senseless. Tim then seizing one of their sticks began to belabour his

brothers-in-law so lustily that they soon recovered their recollection and betook themselves to flight. Their legs trembled so with the fright they were in that they stumbled more than once ; but Tim assisted them on their way by pelting them with bricks. Having driven them off, he took the swine and carried her home, where he arrived just as the day was beginning to break.

The first word which the thieves said on recovering their breath was about the wager with their brother-in-law.

“ Now,” said they, “ as the devil has run away with the swine, Tim cannot produce her, so we will force him to come and live with us again.”

Thereupon they set off straight for the house, because it was already getting light ; but on their arrival they found that they had lost their wager, and that it was not the devil who had

routed them in the deserted cottage, but their brother-in-law.

“Oh, you precious rascal!” said they, “you nearly killed us with terror.”

“There’s no help, brothers,” he replied, “you were thinking of taking two hundred roubles from me, but now you have to pay them to me.”

After some demur, he received the money from them, and began to live in a highly respectable manner.

LONDON :

Printed for THOMAS J. WISE, Hampstead, N.W.

Edition limited to Thirty Copies.



